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Chairman: Ms. Grčić Polić (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Croatia)
later: Mr. Vassallo (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Malta)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 87: Questions relating to information (*continued*) (A/55/21 and A/55/452)

1. **Ms. Tan** (Singapore) said that the rapid progress in the development and dissemination of information technology and telecommunications were removing the spatial and temporal barriers to the free flow of information. On the one hand the media could bridge social differences and nurture solidarity by communicating experiences to their audiences. On the other, they had the power, whether deliberate or accidental, to sow the seeds of enmity and anger. The media were not simply passive recorders of events but actually shaped the unfolding situation. Such power must be accompanied by accountability, as power unchecked posed a potential danger. The solution lay, not in State control of the media, but in the establishment of an institute of non-governmental ombudsmen to serve as watchdogs. Such a scenario had been envisaged in a 1997 paper by the European Journalism Centre, which suggested that non-governmental media accountability systems could perform the function of quality control, ensuring that the media were socially responsible. However, in some developing countries, Governments might still have an important role to play in ensuring media accountability.

2. The media had been empowered by advances in information and communication technologies, in particular with the use of the Internet, which had the ability to deliver text, sound and video at increasing speed and decreasing cost. Such advances raised the question of whether the poorer countries could obtain access to the new technology in order to reap the benefits of the digital revolution. In some developing countries, the cost of a computer was equivalent to eight years' average pay. For two billion people living in low-income countries (less than $800 per capita), there were only 35 telephone lines and five personal computers for every 1000 people. In comparison, in the United States of America, there were 650 telephone lines and 540 computers for every 1000 people. However, it did not automatically follow that the developing countries would grow more slowly; information technology could enable them to skip intermediate stages and exploit the full potential of the digital age. New wireless technologies required less investment and maintenance than traditional ones and were more effective in countries with low population density and broken terrain.

3. Within the framework of its cooperation programme, Singapore was sponsoring training courses and study visits relating to information technology and telecommunications for officials from developing countries. It would expand its technical assistance programme, thereby helping to narrow the technological gap and to enable other countries to reap the benefits of information technology.

4. **Mr. Winn** (Myanmar) said that, in the modern world, traditional means of communication such as radio, television and print were gradually being replaced by new information technologies, in particular by the Internet. Despite the fact that the flow of information was a global phenomenon information technology was not being distributed equitably. Although technologies were continuing to improve, the gulf between the developed and developing countries was widening. The Declaration of the South Summit and the Havana Programme of Action reflected the view that the rapid accumulation of knowledge and the development of new technologies had not touched the lives of the millions of people in developing countries who continued to live in abject poverty.

5. His delegation supported the establishment of a new world information and communication order as called for in General Assembly resolution 34/182. Such an order would help to narrow the gap between the developed and developing countries and enable the latter to build technological capacity. The United Nations had a pivotal role to play in that regard. The Department of Public Information could assist the developing countries to acquire new information techniques, in particular through United Nations information centres and vocational training programmes.

6. His delegation supported the initiative of the Secretary-General aimed at reorienting information activities and increasing their effectiveness. The Department had played an important part in publicizing the role of the United Nations in the symbolically important year 2000, particularly in covering the Millennium Assembly and Summit. The new information technologies, in particular the United Nations web site were very effective in the wide dissemination of the message of the United Nations. The increasing use of the United Nations web site

attested to the tremendous interest in the Organization all over the world. At the same time, it would be useful to continue to use the traditional media, as not all countries were benefiting equally from technological innovation. In that regard, radio had a vital role to play in developing countries in terms of outreach and cost-effectiveness, and his delegation welcomed the launch of a pilot project on the development of an international United Nations radio service. However, it was important to ensure that modern technologies were not used for purposes of propaganda against Member States.

7. **Mr. Dorjsuren** (Mongolia) said that in an era of rapid development of communication technologies, the United Nations had an important role to play in the further development of the world information network. His delegation fully supported the United Nations public information policies and strategic directions. Those policies formed part of the Secretary-General's efforts to create a culture of communication within the United Nations, and also to enhance the effectiveness of the rapid delivery of news to the global media. Those efforts were also directed towards strengthening the role of public information by reorienting the activities of the Department of Public Information. In that connection, mention should be made of the newly redesigned United Nations web site, the Treaty collection, and the Dag Hammarskjöld Library's electronic delivery of information as well as the launching of radio broadcasts in the United Nations languages.

8. On a wider scale, his delegation underlined the need to bridge the gap between the developed and developing countries in the field of public information and communications, which would contribute to sustainable human development in a globalizing world. His delegation strongly advocated a new and more just information and communications order, based on a free and balanced flow of information throughout the world, which, in turn, would promote education and knowledge among the people, particularly in the developing countries.

9. At the same time, his delegation stressed the importance of objective information in regions where United Nations peacekeeping missions operated. The raising of public awareness about United Nations peacekeeping missions and their objectives was crucial to the successful fulfilment of the mandates of those missions. His delegation agreed with the recommendations made in the Brahimi report with regard to the enhancement of operational planning and support of public information in peace operations. Cooperation between the Department of Public Information and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations would be very useful in that respect.

10. His delegation noted with satisfaction the cooperation between Mongolia and the Department of Public Information. In 1999, the Department had published in Mongolian the booklet "Discovering the UN", which had been introduced by the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Hogen, to the participants in the seminar "One world" held in Mongolia. In 2000, the Department had been instrumental in focusing the attention of the international community on the severe consequences for Mongolia's economy and rural population of the bitterly cold winter of the past year. His delegation also expressed appreciation to the Department for including a journalist from Mongolia in its training programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries.

11. **Mr. Zaki** (Egypt) said that ever since its establishment, the Department of Public Information had carried out active work in informing the public about the work of the United Nations in the most varied fields. At the same time, it was essential that, in its work, the Organization should not lag behind the rapid pace of development of information technology and should be able to apply that technology in establishing a new world information order, based on the principles of democracy and justice. The ultimate goal of those efforts was to overcome the gap between developing and developed countries. The new information order should serve as a basis for bringing together peoples, cultures and religions on the basis of the exchange of opinions and information.

12. Turning to the recommendations of the Committee on Information, he said that his delegation wished to focus attention on several aspects. Egypt was closely following the work to develop a United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity, and also to create a telecommunications capacity. In that connection, his delegation noted with satisfaction the Department's efforts to develop a pilot project in September 2000. It was to be hoped that the Secretariat would make all possible efforts to ensure that the project was successful. Egypt looked forward to the submission of the Secretary-General's report, at the next session, about the progress of implementation. He

hoped that, on the basis of that report, the General Assembly would adopt a resolution on the question of creating a telecommunications capacity, taking into account the experience gained.

13. At its session, the Committee on Information had considered the report of the Secretary-General on the integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). His delegation supported the efforts of the Secretary-General to conduct consultations with the States in which that process was being carried out. Those consultations would make it possible to avoid any unpredictable negative consequences of integration.

14. With regard to the question of multilingualism, his delegation hoped that the Secretariat would make new proposals on that issue. Although the efforts made in that sphere were commendable, it should be noted that no proposals to supplement the United Nations web sites with new materials should involve the use of some languages to the detriment of others, which in the long run would undermine the parity among the six official languages. His delegation hoped that the Secretary-General would submit a report with specific proposals on that question in accordance with paragraph 43 of the draft resolution on United Nations public information policies and activities adopted by the Committee on Information.

15. With regard to the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (A/55/305-S/2000/809), his delegation supported the position put forward in the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, which attached great importance to the role of the Department of Public Information, including the units concerned with issues of peace and security. It was to be hoped that the amount of financial and human resources allocated to that sphere would not be reduced.

16. His delegation noted with satisfaction the increased efforts to disseminate information in the field. The goal of those efforts was to create a network of communications with countries in which there were information centres and UNDP offices. At the same time, those offices should concentrate on development activities and should not undertake other work which could distract them from fulfilling their main functions. His delegation wished to ask the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information whether the integration of offices would lead to duplication of work, which would entail the risk of dispersal of the funds allocated to them. In conclusion, his delegation noted with satisfaction the annual training courses organized by the Department for journalists from Palestine, and expressed the hope that the Department would continue that work.

17. **Mr. Al-Qahtani** (Qatar) said that his delegation appreciated the role of information technology in the dissemination of information about the United Nations on the Internet and noted with satisfaction the efforts of the Department of Public Information to update the United Nations web sites and facilitate access to them. Despite financial difficulties and the lack of human resources, the large number of visits to those web sites demonstrated the level of public interest in the work of the United Nations. At the same time, many people did not have a clear idea of the activities it carried out or about its influence on daily life and, if the United Nations wished to achieve success in its activities, it must try to inform the public more widely about its work. In that connection, Qatar welcomed the initiatives put forward by the Secretary-General. Qatar called upon the Committee on Information to take steps to improve the quality of the materials placed on the United Nations web sites in order to maintain the prestige of the Organization. It was important that the United Nations as a whole and the Department in particular should use information resources to explain the goals and publicize the work of the Organization in such fields as the maintenance of peace, disarmament, economic and social development, the safeguarding of the environment and the protection of human rights which were enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. Moreover, such information should reflect the positions and interests of the majority of States Members of the Organization on the basic issues with which it was concerned. Although the Department had done a great deal of work, there were some shortcomings. In particular, it had not succeeded in ensuring full parity between the six official languages of the United Nations, whether on its web sites or in its publications. Qatar urged the Department to allocate available resources in such a way as to ensure language parity in accordance with the decisions of the General Assembly on multilingualism.

18. Qatar welcomed the use of new information technologies, in particular the Internet, but at the same time stressed the need to pay particular attention to

traditional means of communication, such as radio and television, since they were still the basic sources of information for the majority of the inhabitants of developing countries. In that connection, the vital role played by United Nations Radio in disseminating information about the work and objectives of the Organization should be noted. The idea of the daily production of an information bulletin in the six languages for dissemination among radio stations in the various regions of the world was of interest. The United Nations should take the initiative to provide assistance to developing countries in the area of information. In a rapidly changing world, taking into account the trend towards globalization, it was unjust that some regions should be able to use the newest communications technologies, while others lacked that opportunity. In order to achieve progress in that sphere, all distinctions between developed and developing countries in the sphere of information technologies must be eliminated; the United Nations could play an important role in that respect. Since the dissemination of information could also give rise to problems associated with lack of control of its content, such control was essential for the protection of individuals, especially children and other vulnerable groups of the population. The process of the development of information technologies should aim to increase the intellectual level of people and strengthen moral values. In connection with the use of the Internet, there was a danger that some users would ignore those values, and the United Nations should make efforts to inform the public about that problem.

19. **Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Nigeria on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. It welcomed the efforts made by the Department of Public Information to build broad-based global support for the crucial work carried out by the Organization. The Millennium Summit and the Millennium Assembly had provided the Department with a unique opportunity to promote public awareness about and interest in the work of the world body. His delegation believed that the Department had succeeded in fulfilling that task. The development of a new culture of communications in the United Nations was important in promoting a positive image of the work of the Organization. In that connection, Bangladesh supported the increasing use of advanced technology. In particular, it commended the Department's efforts in developing and maintaining the very useful United Nations web site. At the same time, it believed that the new tools of technology should not be used at the expense of traditional means of communication, which were still the main source of information for most of the developing countries. His delegation believed that greater use of radio and television as well as the establishment of a United Nations news service could serve that purpose.

20. With respect to the dissemination of information, Bangladesh strongly believed that the Department should place greater emphasis on activities in the area of economic and social development, as well as human development issues such as poverty eradication, health, education and women's rights. In addition, the Department should disseminate information on issues related to the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, and should make special efforts to disseminate information on the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, to be held in Brussels in May 2001. The Department's information centres had a significant role to play in those efforts. The Department should assist the developing countries in improving their capacity in information-related fields, particularly through the training of journalists, in collaboration with the national Governments of developing countries. With respect to the coverage of United Nations activities, the Department's press releases should highlight the intergovernmental aspects of the Organization's work and provide information on the deliberations of its organs. Currently, the press releases focused too heavily on the Secretariat's role.

21. His delegation was pleased to learn that the Dag Hammarskjöld Library was continuing to move in the direction of a virtual library, with a focus on the delivery of electronic information, support for multilingualism and outreach to depository libraries. However, the use of modern technology should not obscure the need to replenish the Library's printed materials. Most of the publications related to peace and security were kept in the United Nations library in Geneva, causing obvious inconvenience to the delegations in New York. Bangladesh hoped that the Library would acquire a larger number of relevant publications and periodicals from developing countries in order to provide a diversity of resource materials. Bangladesh welcomed the Department's efforts to enhance the technical capabilities of the information centres. However, it was seriously concerned about the

current status of the information centres, particularly the one in Bangladesh. He wondered why that centre still did not have a director, following its de facto integration with the local United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) field office.

22. **Ms. Prince-Agbodjan** (Togo) said that she greatly appreciated the work of the Department of Public Information in introducing new information technologies. One example of the effective use of such technologies had been the adoption of video conferencing in the deliberations of the Millennium Summit and the Economic and Social Council. She also supported the programme for the professional training of journalists from developing countries, and proposed that it should be expanded. Her delegation attached great importance to the strengthening of the Organization's capacity in the area of broadcasting for the African countries, and called upon the Department of Public Information to make active use of radio broadcasting in widely publicizing various international forums, particularly forthcoming conferences on social issues.

23. In that connection, the United Nations should ensure that developing countries could take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the introduction of new information and communication technologies, which were of great help in stimulating economic growth and sustainable development, eradicating poverty and integrating developing countries into the world economy. With respect to the integration of United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices, the expediency of such measures should be considered on a case-by-case basis. As an example of the effectiveness of such measures, she noted the pilot projects under way in Togo in which information centres were included in the structure of government departments and, together with the latter, made use of the Sustainable Development Network, which provided direct access to information from the United Nations web site and maintained a database on social and economic development issues. However, despite the importance of initiatives related to the use of new technologies, efforts were also needed to strengthen activities related to traditional means of disseminating information, such as radio, television and print media. For the further development of information systems, especially the use of new technologies, and out of full respect for the principle of freedom of information, the Government of Togo had established the High Authority for Audio-Visual Information and Communications. In view of the widening gap between developed and developing countries in the use of electronic information and communication media, countries of the South must be encouraged to take further initiatives to introduce new technologies.

24. *Mr. Vassallo (Malta), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

25. **Ms. Durrant** (Jamaica), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that in the modern world, as never before, the free flow of information was shaping people's views and behaviour. Overcoming the barriers of distance and time, new, more complex and more powerful systems were rapidly changing the face of global politics, finance and development strategy. Globalization had significantly increased the role of information generation and processing and society's reliance on the effectiveness of those processes.

26. In that context, the United Nations must become more active in ensuring that Member States, especially developing ones, gained access to technologies that would help them meet new challenges. Undoubtedly, improved access to information and communications would broaden opportunities for professional training and investment and would foster economic development in both developed and developing countries. The delegations of the CARICOM countries therefore welcomed the launching of the "UN Works" campaign, which explained how the Organization was addressing the main challenges of the twenty-first century, particularly those related to economic and social development. The CARICOM countries agreed with the Secretary-General that that project would enhance the image of the United Nations as an effective and indispensable institution capable of facing the challenges of modern times.

27. The report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/55/452) cited very positive steps taken by the Department of Public Information with a view to bridging the information gap between developed and developing countries, including the creation of direct links to journalists worldwide via electronic mail, the introduction of a pilot project developed by the United Nations News Centre delivering to radio stations around the globe and the increased use of video conferences with the

participation of students and other members of civil society. The production of 15-minute news bulletins in the six official languages was a very important activity, since radio remained the most potent medium for disseminating information to developing countries. The CARICOM countries proposed that the radio service of the Department of Public Information should collaborate with government information services in Caribbean countries with a view to airing United Nations programmes specific to the Caribbean using both government and commercial radio broadcasting, in order to meet the growing interest in the United Nations on the part of the region's population.

28. The United Nations information centres continued to play a vital role in organizing events and disseminating information in local languages, demonstrating that the work of the Organization was highly relevant to the daily lives of the region's population. In particular, she noted the work of the United Nations Information Centre in Port-of-Spain (Trinidad and Tobago) which, despite a decline in human and financial resources, entirely fulfilled its mandate to serve the needs of the 14 Caribbean States. However, the CARICOM countries had repeatedly stressed the need to establish an information component within the UNDP Office in Kingston (Jamaica) to serve countries of the northern Caribbean, namely those located north of Barbados. At the session of the Committee on Information in May, there had been reports of progress made in appointing a coordinator in the multi-island UNDP Office in Kingston. Nonetheless, the CARICOM countries were disappointed that despite previous commitments to establish an information component in Jamaica, the Department of Public Information had been unable to do so owing to insufficient resources. The CARICOM countries hoped that that obstacle would be overcome in the very near future.

29. The CARICOM countries attached great importance to the dissemination of information on United Nations peacekeeping operations. As noted in the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (Brahimi report; A/55/305-S/2000/809), an effective public information strategy in mission areas was an operational necessity for virtually all such operations. The efforts of the Department of Public Information in launching Radio UNAMSIL for the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) should be commended; the service currently broadcast programmes on a regular basis in English and in one of the local languages. The participation of local experts in disseminating information was a key factor in strengthening trust on the part of the local population in the mission area. Information broadcast by radio was also essential for promoting local awareness of the peace accords and the United Nations mandate. As mentioned in the Panel's report, effective communication helped to dispel rumour, to counter disinformation and to secure the cooperation of local populations. The CARICOM countries agreed that it was essential that every peace operation should formulate public information campaign strategies, particularly for key aspects of a mission's mandate.

30. The CARICOM countries highly appreciated the work of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, in particular its achievements in the delivery of electronic information, attainment of language parity and outreach to libraries worldwide. Thanks to the United Nations Bibliographic Information System (UNBIS), the Permanent Missions of the States Members of the United Nations enjoyed access via the Internet to all United Nations documentation, as well as to statements by Member States. The CARICOM countries also commended the outreach of the Department of Public Information to young people, in particular through the "Cyberschool bus" system. In developing countries, however, the project's potential was underutilized, and several CARICOM member States were currently examining the possibility of expanding public access to the Internet by making computers available in libraries and post offices.

31. **Mr. Nimac** (Croatia) said that the Department of Public Information in 2000 had played an important role in disseminating information about the United Nations and informing the international community about its work in such important areas as peace and security, poverty eradication and HIV/AIDS. The structure of the United Nations web site had evidently been rationalized, and its quality and content improved. The Department of Public Information should continue its efforts in that regard and attempt to reach the widest possible audience in each region of the world by using the most efficient technology available to it.

32. The recent discussion of United Nations peacekeeping in connection with the Brahimi report had a direct impact on the work of the Department of Public Information, since the report envisaged a transfer of several posts out of the Department in order

to strengthen peacekeeping operations. Due care must be taken in implementing that recommendation lest it should result in the usual bureaucratic restructuring without enhancing the effectiveness of United Nations communications activities. In addition, his delegation supported the integration process between UNDP offices and United Nations information centres, believing it capable of facilitating a continuous flow of information on the work and activities of the United Nations, which was one of the prerequisites for achieving the goals adopted at the Millennium Summit.

33. **Mr. Ahmad** (Pakistan) said that Pakistan attached great importance to the Committee's work, particularly at the current time, when the world was in the midst of an information revolution, which was touching all areas of human activity and transforming the world into a global village. However, while the phenomenon was a global one, its impact was not universal, and a gap was emerging between the developed and developing countries as a result. The removal of the imbalances in the global information revolution was therefore a priority. Information technology must serve to promote progress and prosperity for all peoples through the transfer of appropriate technology to the developing countries, a need that had been underscored at various international meetings on the issue.

34. The United Nations could not perform the important function of disseminating information about its activities to all the world's peoples without modern information and communication technologies, particularly, the Internet. At the same time, however, the importance of the role played by the traditional mass media must not be underestimated, and the Organization's broadcasting capacity should therefore be further enhanced. Those resources must be used to promote the attainment of goals in such key areas as development, poverty eradication, education, science and technology.

35. His delegation attached great importance to the work of the United Nations information centres, which should serve as models with respect to the application of modern information technology and should receive the equipment and financial support necessary for that purpose. The process of integrating the information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme should be implemented gradually, taking into account specificities of each host country.

36. **Mr. Dawit** (Ethiopia) said that the rapid advances in information technology taking place in today's world remained beyond the reach of many developing countries because of their lack of modern equipment. In order to enable developing countries to enjoy the fruits of the information technology revolution, the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) should continue and improve its efforts to assist them to overcome the chronic "information poverty" afflicting them by building capacity in the relevant areas. His delegation welcomed, in that connection, the initiative taken by DPI to strengthen training programmes for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries.

37. While the development of modern information technology in the United Nations and the enhancement of its web sites was welcome, the continuing importance of traditional means of information dissemination must not be overlooked, since they were more accessible for developing countries. Given that, in the majority of African countries, information technology was currently at an early stage of development owing to serious financial constraints, the United Nations system must help to overcome the problem of "information isolation", in particular, by providing finances and building capacity.

38. **Mr. Atieh** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation attached great importance to the establishment of a new international information order reflecting the interests of all peoples. The exchange of information and television and radio broadcasting must be balanced, and information must come from a variety of sources. The United Nations as a whole and the Department of Public Information (DPI) in particular were responsible for disseminating information about the Organization and explaining its aims and its activities in the various regions and, especially, in the developing countries. His delegation wished to reaffirm that the United Nations must pay serious attention to information activities in order to fulfil the goals it had set for itself in such areas as peacekeeping, disarmament and economic and social development. His delegation supported the broadening of access of developing countries to existing information technologies. Information must be presented objectively and impartially. It must be reliable, honest, fair and balanced. The private mass media must not be allowed to interpret international events in their own interests and to gain advantage from them.

39. Mention must be made of the achievements of the Organization as a whole and DPI in particular in the field of information activities. His delegation was ready to cooperate fully with any initiative aimed at better serving the interests of Member States. A series of transparency-related problems persisted. There remained a need to ensure parity among the six official languages of the United Nations and in their use on the United Nations web site. The Arabic language web site was very poor and did not meet users' needs. His delegation called on DPI to study the matter closely and to allocate the necessary resources from the current budget to rectify that situation. The principle to which he had referred must also be applied to the Department's publications. Some publications in the official languages, particularly in Arabic, were issued late.

40. Many countries, particularly developing countries, were very interested in the idea of establishing a United Nations radio service capable of reaching the largest possible number of listeners across the world. His delegation called on DPI to continue with the implementation of that project, since radio was the most economical and accessible means of communication for the population. His delegation valued highly the training courses conducted for persons from developing countries employed in the mass media. Such courses must be organized taking into account the principle of equitable geographical distribution and on an annual basis.

41. **Mr. Nkazengani** (Gabon) said that the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information had referred, in his statement, to the wishes expressed by Member States in previous years at various United Nations forums, particularly in the Committee on Information. Some of those recommendations were already being translated into reality, particularly those relating to the achievement of the optimum balance between new and traditional communication technologies. At the twenty-second session of the Committee on Information, held in May, Member States had called on the Secretary-General to realize his aspiration to rethink United Nations activities at the threshold of the new millennium, so that the Organization could tackle more effectively the tasks before it. His delegation supported that aspiration, given the growing demand for information about United Nations activities. The Department of Public Information had already achieved the first successes in that area, during the coverage of the work of the Millennium Summit, through the introduction of an experimental programme of radio broadcasts from United Nations Headquarters. Special mention should be made, in that connection, of the work of United Nations Radio, which had reported live every day on the main events of the Summit.

42. Within the framework of the cooperation between United Nations Radio and radio services in African countries, including two State and one private radio station in Gabon — the Department had given the country's many listeners the opportunity to become familiar with the priority themes at that meeting, including those relating to Africa, among which had been conflicts, peacekeeping operations, the problem of refugees, humanitarian issues, development problems and other matters. The Department of Public Information should continue to use traditional information technologies in the future, since they were of great significance for a whole range of developing countries, including Gabon, where radio was the main source of information for the majority of families. The cooperation between United Nations Radio and radio stations in the African continent would facilitate the strengthening of the Organization's authority as the sole international body that guaranteed access for all countries to sustainable development, and would contribute to achieving true awareness of the Organization's activities, for which the international community and the Secretary-General were striving. United Nations Radio was undoubtedly traversing a new phase in its development, and there was thus a need to find the necessary financial and human resources to enable it to continue its work and to enhance and raise the quality of its programmes.

43. Every speaker at the twenty-second session of the Committee on Information had expressed support for the efforts of the Department of Public Information to establish a United Nations web site on the Internet. Currently, a new web page devoted to the Millennium Assembly and Summit was being created. His delegation considered that the development of the Internet would make it possible in the future to disseminate information in real time, just as the leading international news services did. It also welcomed the annual holding of the United Nations World Television Forum. Given the backwardness of many countries in that area, it would be appropriate in the future to include as a possible agenda item the issue of

international cooperation in support of the development and modernization of television in the developing countries, as well as related issues connected with financing and transfer of technology.

44. **Mr. Monteiro** (Portugal), speaking on behalf of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries, said that he welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/55/452) and the report of the Committee on Information on its twenty-second session (A/55/21) and greatly appreciated the efforts of the Department of Public Information to address the many problems facing the United Nations in establishing a new world information order. He also wished to give due credit to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for his leading role in the efforts to overcome the "digital divide" among the various peoples.

45. With regard to the ongoing reform of the Radio Service of the Department of Public Information (DPI), he noted the success of the Portuguese-language broadcasts aimed at a large audience numbering more than 230 million persons throughout the world. Thanks to the Portuguese-language programme of the United Nations Radio Service, people were better informed about the important role of the United Nations in the modern world. The countries of the Community strongly supported United Nations Radio's Portuguese-language programme, which required material and human resources if it was to function effectively. Its needs in those areas had been set out in concrete terms by the Secretary-General in document A/AC.198/2000/6. He expressed the hope that, although DPI was under severe financial constraints, it would be able to find the resources that the Portuguese-language programme so badly needed in order to remain the primary source of information on the role of the United Nations for millions of people across the world, both today and in the forthcoming millennium.

46. **Mr. Patrício** (Angola) said that his delegation wished to align itself with the statement made by the representative of Portugal on behalf of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries. In Angola, over 12 million listeners were reached daily by United Nations Radio programmes. Those programmes were one of the Angolan population's main sources of information on the situation in the world and the way in which the United Nations coped with its many challenges. After Angola had gained independence, communication had played a fundamental role in strengthening national unity and democracy. United Nations Radio's Portuguese-language programme should therefore be reinforced.

47. **Mr. Troyjo** (Brazil) said that his delegation was following attentively the process of integrating the United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme. That issue must be approached on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of the host countries. His delegation attached particular importance to the information contained in United Nations radio broadcasts. He noted with satisfaction the agreement reached between the Brazilian public radio network and United Nations Radio, which allowed a vast audience in Brazil to be reached. The information put together in New York was heard in the Portuguese-speaking countries of Africa, in Europe and in East Timor.

48. However, given the volume of work in Portuguese handled by United Nations Radio, the Portuguese-language team should be enlarged in order to enhance programming quality and reach a wider audience. In that connection, his delegation again appealed to the Department of Public Information to consider allocating the necessary resources to add new staff to the Portuguese-language team, so that it might reach the strength envisaged in the statement made on behalf of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP). Brazil was making concerted efforts to expand the use of new technologies in the dissemination of United Nations information. The Internet was clearly the most appropriate tool for that purpose. His delegation supported initiatives aimed at expanding Portuguese-language content on the United Nations web site, and in the pilot project for short-wave United Nations radio broadcasting. They would contribute significantly to a broader and more effective dissemination of United Nations information in Brazil and all other Portuguese-speaking countries.

49. **Mr. Osei** (Ghana) said it was vital to ensure that developing countries did not lag further behind developed countries in their access to information technology. The Department of Public Information had a key role to play in using information technology to promote social and economic development, taking into account the cultural traditions of developing countries. In that connection, the project creating direct links to journalists worldwide via electronic mail was highly commendable. As for the integration of United Nations

information centres with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) offices, it must be carried out on a case-by-case basis so as to ensure that the primary objective of the information centres were not overshadowed by resource constraints.

50. His delegation was following with interest the growing involvement of the Department of Public Information in international peacekeeping operations. The Department's operational support to the public-information components of peacekeeping operations enabled the effectiveness of conflict-management processes to be enhanced, especially at the peace-building stage. His delegation supported the efforts of the Department to utilize the potential of the Internet to generate support for peace-building operations. However, in view of the limited access in Africa to information and communications technology, information conveyed through the Internet must be supplemented with radio and television programmes. Equally pertinent was the success in Africa of the travelling exhibition on United Nations peacekeeping. Such exhibitions educated the public about efforts to bring peace and stability to countries in conflict and helped broaden public support for peacekeeping operations. Other useful activities undertaken by the Department included the celebration of World Press Day and the continuation of such valuable United Nations publications as *African Recovery*, *Yearbook of the United Nations* and the *UN Chronicle*. The Department should expand its partnerships in Africa to include the private sector, and the United Nations information centres should help identify potential partners.

51. His delegation followed with interest the Secretary-General's global compact initiative with business, labour and civil society, particularly with regard to the introduction of new information technology. The creation of such a partnership was of great relevance to development, and it was the hope of the African countries that the Economic and Social Council and the Department of Public Information, which had jointly organized the Information Technology exhibition during the 2000 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, would continue to strive to include computer technology issues in the Council's future programmes of work. In conclusion, he commended the work of the United Nations in making up-to-date information on its activities available to Member States through the United Nations web site but stressed that it was important not to lose sight of the traditional media and other forms of outreach to those in developing countries who were as yet unable to fully benefit from new technologies.

52. **Mr. Sai** (Algeria) said that information and communications had throughout the centuries been of vital importance to mankind. Currently, thanks to the growth of advanced technologies, the world had been transformed into a global village where every individual, wherever he or she might be, could be in touch with the smallest events occurring on the other side of the world. Data transfer could now be carried out with extreme rapidity thanks to the incredible development of printing techniques, publishing capabilities and the media. However, certain aspects of that unprecedented growth raised valid concerns. Given that the media and communications were for the most part currently controlled by specific interest groups and individuals, many countries were, on the one hand, frustrated by the fact that they lacked the opportunity of making their fears and concerns known to the international community and, on the other hand, alarmed at the numerous known instances of information being used as a form of pressure. It was precisely for that reason that the majority of developing countries were in favour of a new world information and communications order.

53. His delegation welcomed the fact that the Department continued to strengthen the role of communications within the United Nations with a view to increasing the international community's awareness of the challenges the Organization faced, particularly in the fields of decolonization, development, disarmament and the promotion of human rights. The Department should devote special attention to covering the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, which the General Assembly planned to hold in 2001. The Department had done well to let itself be guided, in planning its work, by the results of the discussions and recommendations of the Committee on Information. His delegation would continue to help implement useful initiatives and innovations in that field. However, it was concerned that the variety of cultures and languages of Member States and of United Nations outreach audiences should be taken into account. In that connection, it was vital that wide use should be made of traditional media, since a number of countries of the South continued to lack access to modern means

of electronic communication, the Internet included. His delegation associated itself with those delegations which urged the Department of Public Information to strengthen the information and communications capacity of United Nations information centres, especially in developing countries.

54. **Mr. Tommo** (Cameroon) said that his delegation supported the recommendation aimed at developing the United Nations radio broadcasting capacity in close cooperation with national radio and television services in order to better publicize the tasks facing the United Nations. To that end, the Department should strive for a better balance between the various languages used, between printed publications and radio and television broadcasts and between traditional and modern media.

55. Endorsing the important role of the United Nations information centres in publicizing the Organization's activities, he said that his delegation considered that it was time to strengthen the Information Centre in Yaoundé. During the recent reforms the tendency to integrate information centres with local UNDP offices had emerged. That trend should continue, in direct consultation with the Governments of host countries. The regional Information Centre in Yaoundé served several Central African States, and his delegation hoped that provision would be made in the budget for the coming biennium to upgrade equipment at the Centre and establish a post for a full-time director.

56. **Mr. Kanaan** (Observer, Organization of the Islamic Conference, OIC) said that, while the benefits of modern information technology could not be denied, the potential for manipulation and distortion of information and the danger of religious and cultural intimidation must not be allowed to undermine the integrity and sovereignty of States. OIC wished to stress the importance of implementing policies which met with the approval of Member States in the field of information and the future development of information technologies. To that end, special attention should be accorded to the use of satellite links by both private and State broadcasting companies. Indeed, the meeting of Islamic countries held in September 2000 in Saudi Arabia had been devoted to multipartite cooperation in that area. If the communications requirements of Islamic countries were met more fully, that might encourage the production of joint programmes. The information strategy of OIC was based on the use of the services of the Islamic Broadcasting Organization and the International Islamic News Agency, together with the realization by Islamic countries of programmes for developing information technologies. A draft ethical code for media employees had also been prepared by member States of OIC.

57. In view of the vital importance of information, particularly in relation to the question of Palestine, OIC, in cooperation with the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Islamic Broadcasting Organization, had prepared a documentary film on the situation in Al-Quds Al-Sharif. The film stressed the distinctively Arab characteristics of the city and threw light on Israel's unlawful attempts to alter its geographic and demographic specificities and to defile its sacred places. OIC, conscious of its role in facilitating dialogue among civilizations, welcomed the efforts of the Department of Public Information in creating a site on the Internet to publicize events connected with that ongoing dialogue and wished to express its gratitude for the continuation of information programmes on the question of Palestine and the organization of educational programmes for journalists from Palestine and member States of OIC.

58. **Mr. Hogen** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information), after stating that the various opinions, ideas, proposals and recommendations put forward would be reflected in the future work of the Department, assured the Committee that he and the senior officials in the Department would discuss the problems, questions and requests raised during the general debate.

59. **The Chairman** suggested that the Committee should simultaneously take action on the two draft resolutions and the draft decision adopted by consensus by the Committee on Information and contained in paragraph 55 of its report (A/55/21).

60. *Draft resolutions A and B and the draft decision of the Committee on Information were adopted.*

61. **Mr. Akopian** (Armenia) said that he was grateful to the Committee on Information for appointing Armenia as a member. He assured delegations that Armenia would cooperate and participate fully in the work of the Committee.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.